



ELSAH HISTORY

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1 Elsie, 2 Artists A 44 Year Relationship

By Judith Felch

Judith Felch, past resident of Elsie, writes about 1963 to 2008 when she and her husband Glenn Felch, both artists and art teachers at Principia College, immersed themselves in the creative possibilities of Elsie.

Glenn and Judith before Elsie

Glenn always knew that he was an artist. By the time he was a teenager, he had won art scholarships. His cartoon characters enlivened shop windows and school publications in Keene, New Hampshire, where his family roots were. Glenn said of this time that he was happiest by himself, creating in his bedroom art studio. He felt uprooted by a family move to Chicago during high school until he arrived at Elsie and Principia College.

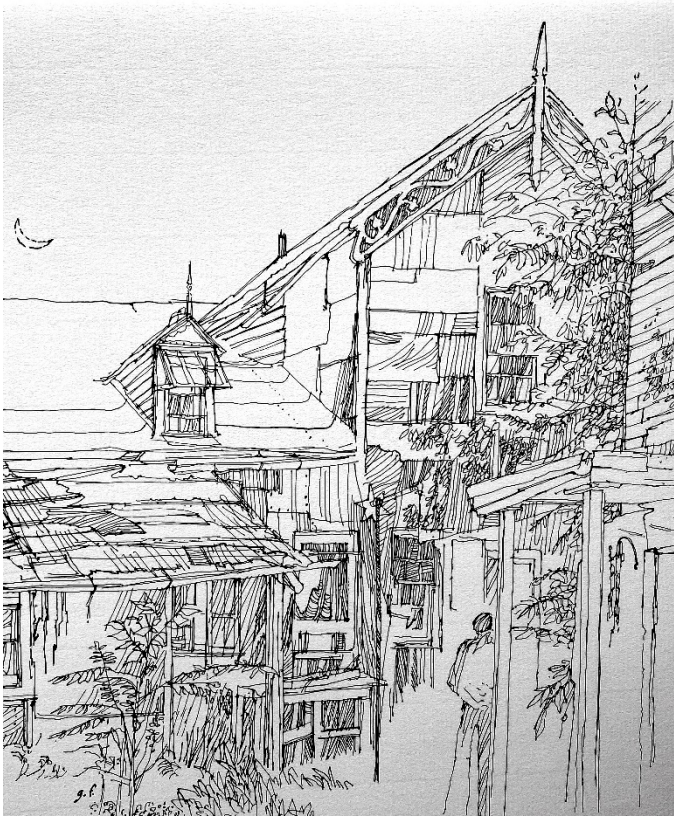
Judith: The public library and history museums in my hometown of Niagara Falls, New York, gave me early views of the world. As a child, inspired by history books, I chose archaeology as my future profession and began filling notebooks with precisely copied Mayan symbols. I built an Egyptian pyramid including interior paintings and later, a balsa wood Globe Theater model. Before high school, my family moved to Atlanta, Georgia. Not until 1963, my freshman year at Principia College, did it dawn on me that my personal creative choices profiled those of a visual artist.



Judith sketching at the corner of Mill and Selma Streets, Elsie



Glenn as teacher, drawn by a student, V7 pen sketch



"Tarpaper Torment", Riverview house, V7 pen, Glenn Felch

In 1963 the route to Elsie and Principia College was a pastoral ride through farm fields. Before completion of the River Road, Elsie seemed in harmony with this rural setting. I remember the village as less manicured then. Many yards sported clothes on lines, abandoned garden tools and wheelbarrows, and the juxtaposition of peeling and immaculately painted house trim. Riverview House, then the Rhoads family antique store (left), was still heavily covered in random shaped pieces of tarpaper, and a fascinating array of items for sale was stacked around the exterior. Unmowed yards covered with tall grasses and natural wild flowers felt right -- a gentle, peaceful sense of living.

Elsie also presented a different impression of relative scale at that time. Huge maple trees lined Mill Street (bottom) and grew in many yards. The size and quantity of these trees emphasized strong vertical shapes producing complex shadows, and made the one-story cottages look even more tiny.



"Corner of Mill and Alpa Streets", V7 pen, Glenn Felch



Left: McNair House/Hosmer mural, acrylic, G. Felch
Right: The Elsay Ice House, charcoal, Glenn Felch

Glenn: Early Elsay art projects

Glenn breathed all things Elsay from the moment he arrived as a freshman. He could be seen wandering through every street, alley, backyard, train culvert, and creek bed, locating sites to sketch and paint. Deeply invested in Elsay's history, he researched village architecture and interviewed residents to capture memories about life in Elsay. As his work matured, he added content symbolism, such as ice tongs in a drawing of the icehouse ruin (top right). The Elsay Art Project, as this collection of work is called, resides at Principia. Painted panels of 19th century Elsay waterfront, owned by Historic Elsay Foundation, can be viewed at the Village Hall, now Elsay Museum. Dr. Charles Hosmer, Professor of History, collaborated with Glenn on both projects.

Elsah outbuildings: small shapes

There is an innate integrity to these buildings. They were not frivolous. Each fulfilled a specific purpose in the daily lives of early Elsay residents. Families stored food and wood, and housed chickens. Modest barns provided space for animals, buggies, farm equipment and the drying of plants. One family had a building for washing laundry. Most residences

needed a space for making and fixing tools. Some business buildings might be included here such as the small gas station and car repair on LaSalle Street. And, of course, privy buildings dotted the village. A large percentage of these small buildings are gone, and the ones remaining mostly serve as storage for modern life's collections of "stuff".

As artists, Glenn and I loved the juxtaposition of these intimately scaled shapes. They gave a natural aesthetic variety in our art, but also presented a deeper insight into how Elsay residents thought, lived, and worked. Students liked drawing the outbuildings partially because they were more easily understood architecturally.

In Belote Shed (bottom), Glenn included the metal fence post holding the door closed as a symbol for the pragmatism in solving a broken door latch. The acorn squash was a nod to the Belote's bountiful vegetable garden.



Belote Shed and Keller Barn with squash, gouache, Glenn Felch



Art students on LaSalle St. Pfeifer House seen in background

Elsah as classroom

From the opening of the Principia College campus in 1935, faculty art teachers have used Elsah as a teaching destination. In this tradition, I gave demos to students for 40 years, totaling over 500 drawings. My first requirement was to keep the students safely out of the streets. Only Boomer, a bloodhound of advanced years, was allowed to rest in the roads. Reviewing Glenn's and my demo portfolios, certain compositions recurred more frequently primarily because these scenes offered a field large enough to accommodate 20-30 students behind us.



Demo drawing of Miss Lucy's Union Hotel with foreground field visual interest, graphite, Judith Felch

The wild lot behind the Union Hotel was such a location. This demo (bottom left) introduced the surprise of shading around a positive shape. This drawing is now a historic record of a vanished Elsah view. The demo in the quiet alley (bottom right) covered how white negative shapes might provide powerful compositional elements to a drawing.

Flora and Bob Lowder's house

Flora and Bob resided in a typical modest Elsah cottage at the north end of the village on Mill Street. Flora was locally famous for her delicious pies and was a pastry chef at Principia College for many years. Among other jobs, Bob drove the Principia school bus. After both passed, there were no buyers for their house as people wanted larger homes. These three selected visual records (p. 5) by Glenn capture a slice of Elsah history as recorded in one property. The final watercolor is about what remained: the outbuilding and the delicate steel fencing. Elsah has lost many buildings both large and small: warehouses, stores, a cider mill, a paper mill, the Odd Fellows Hall, the Union Hotel.



Demo viewed from alley between Mill and LaSalle Streets looking south to the Mississippi River. The Village Inn/Bradley/Verseman House, graphite, Judith Felch



Lowder House, LaSalle Street, Beginning watercolor class on-location demo, Sepia color, Glenn Felch



"Board by Board", Demolition of the Lowder House, graphite, Glenn Felch



The woodshed outbuilding and wire fence remain, watercolor painted during a winter academic leave, Glenn Felch



Miss Lucy's Union Hotel with the morning newspaper delivery, gouache, Glenn Felch

Elsah as symbol

No subject intrigued Glenn more than Miss Lucy's Union Hotel (top). Lucy McDow delivered the newspapers; people picked them up there. The lemon references the faint lemon aroma scenting the air as one passed the building, perhaps from her lemon cleaning water used to rinse the clapboards. And the texture, color, and fragility of the hotel reminded Glenn of a brown paper bag.

Glenn wrote, "No building in Elsah do I love more. Its presence leaves an indelible impression on all who linger long enough to absorb even a few of its subtle shapes and colors." Unfortunately, this building suffered a severe fire and was ultimately torn down.

In deep snow: A winter quarter sabbatical in Elsah

Why would an en-plein-air watercolor painter choose winter for a sabbatical? According to Glenn, because trees become linear and skeletal. New views and therefore new design possibilities appear when space is not blocked by leaves. Snow eliminates fussy texture and reveals sculptural form. Sounds are dampened and silence increases with fewer cars. And there are no mosquitoes. Samples of work accomplished during Glenn's winter sabbatical appear on pages 5, 6 and 7.



Methodist Church 1874, watercolor and gouache, Glenn Felch



Page illustration from "Once Upon a Valley", gouache, Glenn Felch

Elsah as narrative

Glenn and I strongly felt that to inspire students, we needed to produce consistently our own work. So, alongside his Children's Book Illustration class, Glenn created "Once Upon a Valley" (top). This Elsah story is about a gourd seed that germinates in Marie Cresswell's yard and meanders through iconic backyards as it grows. The book ends with a huge gourd loaded on a barge floating to market. Lots of seeds grew in Marie's yard, and I forged steel sculptures of plants to reinforce her title as "Weed Queen of Elsah".

Marie Cresswell and Lucy McDow, life time Elsah residents, were featured frequently in Glenn's work. This image (middle right) shows Miss Lucy, loaded with fuel, returning from her woodshed.



Miss Lucy's Woodshed, winter sabbatical painting, watercolor, Glenn Felch



Judith (nee McCreary) Felch taught drawing and metalsmithing (Principia College) until retiring in 2008. She resides in Maine and is an active, full-time artist. Photos are courtesy of Judith Felch



Glenn Felch (deceased) taught drawing and watercolor (Principia College) until retiring in 2008. He continued actively painting in Maine. He was married to Judith Felch for 39 years.

Village acquires properties from Principia College

By Cecily Lee

Elsah used to be something of a patchwork quilt in terms of property ownership. Except for private homes, it was sometimes hard to know just who owned what. In fact, that's how the conversation between the Village government and Principia College got started -- the one that resulted in the transfer of 10 properties from the latter to the former last June.

Here's how it happened. As part of the ongoing project of Village enhancement, the Trustees decided to have an outdoor fireplace built in a green space between the Civic Center and the bridge on LaSalle St. Whoops! It turned out that little piece of land actually belonged to the College, not the Village.

Good neighbors

Happily, given the longstanding “good neighbor” relationship between the College and the Village, there were no hard feelings over that blooper. In the past, the College owned a number of houses, including Riverview, within the Village limits, which it rented out to faculty. The Maybeck-designed gas station on LaSalle St. and a number of green spaces abutting the creek and elsewhere were also owned by Principia. As the demand for faculty housing decreased, Principia began selling off the houses, and it gave the gas station to the Christian Science church for its Reading Room.

During conversations between Principia administrators and Mayor Mike Pitchford in the Fall of 2021, the College offered to transfer those 10 remaining “patches” to the Village – nine at no cost except the needed paperwork, and one for a sale price of \$10,000.



Community gathers at fireplace picnic area.

This exception was due to the need for a competitive bid to secure the lot. It seemed the College had no particular use for these lots, and the transfer would free it of property-related maintenance and liability costs. For its part, the Village appreciated the opportunity to consolidate its public green spaces (the lots are under a conservation easement). In short, it was a mutually beneficial proposition.

Trustee action

Without delay, the Trustees held a special meeting on December 9, 2021 to consider the matter. Then at their regular meeting on December 14, they voted to proceed with the transfer of the properties and with the purchase of the one with a cost. The requisite surveying of lots was done. The title searches and transfers of title were handled by Strang Parish & Graham dba Colonial Title & Escrow. The settlement took place on June 15, 2022. Eight of the lots are on Mill Street and two are on Mississippi St.

Commenting on the transfer, Mayor Mike Pitchford stated, “I think it demonstrates what close cooperation between the Village of Elsah and Principia College can accomplish.”

Audubon Bird Count:

A 70-year Elsah tradition

By Tom Fuller

Between December 14, 2022 and January 5, 2023, over 75,000 folks counted birds all over the Western Hemisphere for the 123rd consecutive Audubon Christmas Bird Count. For our part, several Elsah citizens and a few others conducted the "Elsah Circle" count. Ornithology depends deeply on such citizen scientists. The thousands of eyes and ears are indispensable to understanding the continental movements and conditions of our feathered fauna.

December results

In the December count, our team recorded 4,500 birds representing 65 species -- ranging from Bald Eagle (weighing about 12 pounds) to Golden-crowned Kinglet (barely 1/5 ounce).



Golden-crowned Kinglet

Audubon also organizes a Spring count each year. Elsah Circle has participated in the Christmas and Spring counts for some 70 years. This winter we had about a dozen observers, half in the field and half watching their own yards. This is a good turnout for us. However, I've counted in California circles with a hundred observers each. (Each "circle" is 15 miles in diameter.)



Sue Fuller & Mary Jane Hoff, 2003

Unusual sightings

Some years, e.g. 2013, my wife Sue and I were the entire Elsah count team! That year, we saw a White-winged Scoter, near Chautauqua. Scoters nest far north on Canadian lakes and winter on the ocean. They're a rare (and fun!) visitor here. Another year, so much snow drifted against the team leader's trailer door that he couldn't get out! We had only three counters that year; the count was mostly confined to watching feeders in two yards!

Count teams include experienced birders and newbies. Anyone can serve as a spotter. The Spring Bird Count will be May 13, 2023. If interested in joining us -- to support citizen science and just enjoy some outdoor fun, write to TomFuller2001@gmail.com.

Dr. Thomas J. Fuller is an avid birder. He taught Computer Science and Mathematics at Principia College for many years and spent a lot of time in the campus observatory while there. Tom divides his time between Elsah and Maine.

Elsah tidbits as recounted by Emmett Murphy: A mystery interview

While going through her husband's papers, Jeralyn Lewitz came upon a typed, unsigned summary of an interview of Elsah resident Emmett Murphy. Jeri rules out her husband, Chuck Hosmer, as the interviewer; they were out of town on the cited date – July 28, 1967. She thinks Paul Williams, Chuck's colleague and cofounder of Historic Elsah Foundation, likely did it. They two interviewed numerous Elsah residents in constructing the Village's historical record. But they also had their Principia College students conduct interviews.

History is put together from innumerable puzzle pieces, such as this document. The excerpt reprinted here, verbatim (with bracketed clarifications) invites us to reflect on the subjective nature of oral history with its dependence on far distant memories and interpretations. Enjoy the musing...



Cupola: For a river captain's waiting wife or a stargazer?

Excerpted text from interview:

“... She said that Emmet Murphy's [her own] uncle, John Reintjes, was the first white child born in Elsah. His father [Peter Reintjes] had been asked by General Semple to come to Elsah to help found the town. He had floated on a flatboat down from Kenosha, Wisconsin.

First he set up a tent on the site of the present Gate Lodge [across the creek at the entrance to the Village]. Then he built two log cabins, one behind the site of the Murphy house, and the other on the site of the Barnes house.



Former Murphy (now Charters) House at 33 LaSalle St.

The present Murphy house, she said, was built in 1852. For a time it was a tavern, that is, a sort of inn where shippers and farmers, etc. could spend the night. There was a wagon scales just north of their house, though not on the property.

She said that the cupola of the Village Inn [14 LaSalle St.] never had been a widow's walk but had been built by E. Murphy's father and another man for a man interested in astronomy, who kept his telescope up there. The boat captain, Starr, didn't live there but lived next door.

Semple, she said, had intended that the whole town be built of stone. She thought it was a myth about the town's being named after an ancestral home in Scotland.”

Prehistoric tusk found at Principia College

By Cecily Lee

Two sets of remains of now extinct prehistoric animals found less than a mile apart in an interval of 24 years? While this may seem a highly improbable scenario, it is just what happened when, in July of last year, the top side of a tusk came to light on the Principia College campus in Elsah IL.

The exciting find mirrored the 1999 discovery of the tooth of a male woolly mammoth dating back some 17,500 years, now housed in the College's Science Center. Named after the maintenance crew member who noticed something unusual while working on the grounds, "Benny" was dug up and reconstructed over the course of 14 years by scores of Principia undergraduates under the guidance of former geology professor Janis Treworgy.

Expert confirms

Examined by Dr. Melissa Pardi, Assistant Curator of Geology at the Illinois State Museum, at the College's request, the find was definitively identified as made of ivory, making it unquestionably a tusk. In this case, it was Principia College maintenance crew member Mike Towell who made the discovery while excavating earth from a burrow pit at about 12 feet below ground level for the purpose of shoring up campus road banks. When Mr. Towell's blade hit something hard, he got off for a closer look. On seeing a long white piece of something, he recognized it as unusual and, in accord with his training, steered clear and reported it. Following the previous naming protocol, the newly found animal is now referred to as "Mike."



Drs. Pardi and Martin examine the find.

Whose tusk is this? is the first big question. It could belong to another woolly mammoth like Benny, or it could be the tusk of a mastodon, a smaller animal closer in size to today's elephants. But it's too early to tell. The mystery will remain until the tusk is sufficiently unearthed to observe its curvature. If noticeably curved, it is a mammoth; if it has a gentler curve, it is a mastodon.

Following the discovery, steps were immediately taken to protect the find from the elements and to prevent its disturbance by curiosity-seekers. Dr. Andrew Martin, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Archaeology and Art History at Principia College, noted in a St. Louis Public Radio/NPR interview (Jan. 25, 2023) that a small "coracle" boat, built by students in one of his Native American culture classes, is currently being used to cover the tusk.



Close-up of the tusk.

Ownership ceded to state

In a KMOX radio interview (Jan. 23, 2023), College president John Williams explained that while state law accords ownership of such finds to the property owners of the site, Principia has ceded ownership of the remains to the state of Illinois in order to ensure their protection in perpetuity. The remains will, nevertheless, remain at the College for the foreseeable future.

New GPR and old brushes

Will it take another 14 years to put Mike back together? Probably not, considering that the technology has advanced over the past quarter century and the College has the previous dig experience as precedent. When Benny was discovered, there was no GPR – Ground-Penetrating Radar -- available. Mike's site, on the other hand, has already been "viewed" with GPR by University of Illinois colleagues Dr. Melissa Silverman and Dr. Brandon Richardson. While unable to detect exactly what is below, the process did reveal that something out of the ordinary is there.

In addition to GPR, new scientific recording instruments have become available since Benny's dig, Dr. Martin stated. The College has acquired a station that uses laser technology to locate such finds and record the location. But the hands-on work still remains, Dr. Martin observed. "The thing about archeology is, there isn't any easy way of going about it. It has been the same for a couple of hundred years. You can't avoid the painstaking task of picking off dirt with brushes and toothpicks."

The extent of deterioration and scattering of the remains, unknown at this time, will determine whether Mike can or cannot ultimately be reconstructed. President Williams recalled the complexity of moving Benny's head block, which contained the surrounding soil to hold the pieces

together. Weighing over a ton, it took a forklift and crane to move it. The weather is another slowdown factor. Cold, wet and muddy conditions interrupt the work.

Mammoths and mastodons were most likely attracted to this area as a fertile feeding site in summer. They were buried in loess, a fine dust generated by great dust storms that developed during the dry winters. It is hypothesized that the loess may well have choked the animals and caused their demise and eventual extinction.



Principia College students who worked on Benny's dig site over a decade ago.

Experiential learning focus

Dr. Martin will launch the dig to unearth Mike this fall with his students in Archaeological Field Studies. When he started teaching at Principia in 2014, he was delighted to see how the Benny project had regenerated student interest in the field of archaeology, and he expects the same to happen with the Mike dig. He notes the unique educational opportunities for hands-on experiential learning and scientific discovery afforded to Principia students by the upcoming dig.

History in the making...

Village happenings October 2022 – March 2023

With the end of Covid sheltering and masking, people have gathered again, in old and new ways. These items were reported in Escape to Elsau, the Village's monthly newsletter..

October

Trivia contest – Community members came out for this event at our outdoor fireplace.



November

St. Louis Post-Dispatch features historic Elsau home at 33 LaSalle St.

Lighting of giant Christmas tree – Villagers take part at Principia College.



December

2022 Home for the Holidays – Over 500 tickets sold to our traditional fundraiser (above).

Village church congregations joined in fellowship for Christmas story and carols.

Elsah Circle Audubon Christmas Bird Count - Some 4,500 birds counted (see p. 9).

January

Three Rivers Community Farm honored as an Illinois "Maker".

Peace Works – Moved from Mill St. house into the Mott building on LaSalle St.

February

Friendship potluck – Residents gathered to eat, chat and sing together at Civic Center.



Black experience celebrated – Works by Black artists, authors, musicians were shared.

March

Silent movie at Farley's – Chaplin's *The Kid* with live piano accompaniment by Richard Eagan.

CPR-AED training – Residents took part.

Solar Car Ra XI demonstration and talk by Principia students and instructors at Farley's.



HEF News

Hosmer-Williams Lectures at Farley's

April 20, 7:30 pm - Tim Tomlinson, President Emeritus of Historic Elsie Foundation, will speak on "The West Point of the Air: Choosing a Site for the Air Force Academy." We are most grateful to Tim for organizing the 2023 Lecture Series and securing financial support for it from Liberty Bank of Alton.

May 18, 7:30 pm – Tom Emery, freelance writer and historical researcher, will speak on the Civilian Conservation Corps in our area. Emery has 29 book titles and pamphlets to his name and is a frequent lecturer and contributor to newspapers. He has written on Elsie founder James Semple, among other topics.

Farson and Brown join HEF Board

Help us welcome two new board members!

Dr. Marie Farson is rolling up her Elsie sleeves with the recent purchase of the Inge Mack home on Palm St. A current Principia faculty member, Marie chairs the Engineering department. As a marine engineer, she has over 15 years of sea-going research experience working with autonomous and unmanned vehicles in Panama, Singapore and India.

Steve Brown hails from Philadelphia and lived in St. Louis, L.A. and Denver before moving to Elsie in 2019. As a member of Hollywood Heritage, he was on the crew that restored the Lasky-DeMille barn that was part of the stage set of the first full length film in 1913. He is excited to serve on the HEF Board and work at the Village Museum.

Village of Elsie Museum's spring opening

It was great to see those Village Hall doors open up again following the winter closing. Residents and visitors celebrated the reopening at a reception held April 1. A new display of winning photographs from

the Museum's past Photo Exhibits was on view.

Museum hours: Saturday & Sunday, 1-4 pm, April-October. Admission: free.



Village Museum prepares for bell pier installation

2024 Photo Exhibit launched

As you amble through Elsie, why not take a moment to capture your visual impressions? You can enter your best shots in the Village Museum's 2024 Photo Competition and Exhibit. Themes for submissions this year are:

- **Native species** – Honor the Village's ongoing efforts to re-establish them along our creeks and wetlands. There are several stellar bloom periods!
- **Historical abstraction** – Find and create breathtaking, uncommon compositions of our built environment. Close-up details, unusual lighting and out-of-the-way views are the ticket!

The first week of January 2024 is the due date for entries. Winning photos will be on exhibit at the Museum the following April. Watch for the rules at www.historicelsie.org by June. Questions? Write danne.rhaesa91@gmail.com

Ding donging for donations

Stone mason resident Mike Rhaesa will soon start building a custom-designed stone pier as a base for the old Village Hall bell. It will be located in front of the museum, close to the sidewalk. However, we still need over \$1,300 to make this happen. Your donations are most appreciated!

Online: www.historicelsah.org/bell

or by check: HEF, PO Box 117, Elsah 62028.

HEF staffing need: *Elsah History* Editor

A note from outgoing editor Cecily Lee:

It has been a real joy for me to put together the last seven issues of *Elsah History* while serving as an HEF Board member for the past three years. But it's time to pass to pass the baton. If you enjoy editing/writing and love Elsah and its fascinating history, please consider doing this job! If interested, Contact HEF President Donna DeWeese.

A special note of thanks to our contributing authors, as well as to those who have done the layout: Melody Hauf-Belden and Abigail DeWeese.

Farley Music Hall as event venue

This historic building, owned and maintained by HEF, provides a simple yet elegant space for weddings, receptions, showers, family gatherings and other events. It has a small kitchen and sound & projection system. The cost is \$200 per rental, and it books up quite fast in the spring.

Contact: historicelsah@gmail.com

Safety notice: AED moved to Post Office

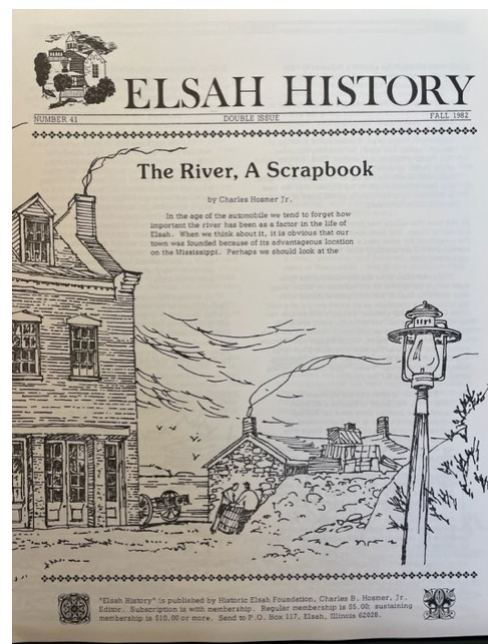
The Village's AED has been moved from the Green Tree Inn to the outer lobby of Elsah's US Post Office at **48 Mill St.**, 618-374-2491. It is accessible 24/7.

Taking care of HEF business!

Historic Elsah Foundation is energetically engaged in running its educational lecture series, co-managing the Village Museum, revitalizing our Photo Exhibit, publishing *Elsah History* semi-annually, hosting public and private events at Farley's Music Hall, organizing Home for the Holidays house tours, maintaining the website and being attentive to historical preservation matters in the Village. Other ongoing projects include digitizing HEF records and updating the *Elsah Guidebook*.

Want to delve into *Elsah History*(s)?

You can look through past issues, dating back to the very first one published in Fall 1971, at www.archives.com. Enter "Elsah History" in the search function.



Elsah History #41, Fall 1982

HEF Purpose Statement

The purposes of Historic Elsay Foundation are:

- to preserve and enhance the historic buildings, houses, architecture, culture and natural environment of the Village of Elsay, Illinois;
- to encourage historical research and publication of materials on the Village and nearby historic areas;
- to foster educational programs for the general public on the history of the Village and the larger region.

Historic Elsay Foundation Board

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Jeff DePew	Cecily Lee (outgoing)
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Memberships

Student	\$25
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Benefactor	\$1000



Donations

Donations are needed and always much appreciated!
You can mail a check or give through our website
(see Contact Info below).

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Happy Spring and Summer!

